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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

SYLVIA AHN,
Individually and as Successor-in-
Interest to the Estate of
Choung Woong Ahn,

Plaintiff,

v.

GEO GROUP, INC.; UNITED
STATES IMMIGRATION AND
CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
and; UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA,

Defendants.

Case No. 1:22-cv-00586

**SECOND AMENDED
COMPLAINT AND DEMAND
FOR JURY TRIAL**

SECOND AMENDED COMPLAINT AND REQUEST FOR RELIEF

Introduction

1. This is a survival, wrongful death, and disability discrimination action for compensatory and punitive damages arising out of the torture and preventable death by suicide of Choung Woong Ahn inside a solitary confinement cell at the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Facility (“Mesa Verde”).

Parties

2. Plaintiff Sylvia Ahn (“Plaintiff”) is the natural and legal daughter of the decedent, Choung Woong Ahn (“Mr. Ahn”), and an adult resident of Houston, Texas. Plaintiff is the Successor-in-Interest of the Estate of Choung Woong Ahn. Plaintiff brings this action Individually and on behalf of the estate of Choung Woong Ahn.
3. Decedent Choung Woong Ahn died while incarcerated at Mesa Verde in Bakersfield, California on May 17, 2020. Prior to his imprisonment Choung Woong Ahn was a resident of Oakland, California.
4. At all times relevant to the Complaint, Defendant GEO Group, Inc. (“GEO Group”) is and was a Florida corporation with its principal street address located at 4955 Technology Way, Boca Raton, FL 33431.
5. At all times relevant to the complaint GEO Group owned and operated Mesa Verde in Bakersfield, CA pursuant to a contractual arrangement with

government parties including, at times, the City of McFarland and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

6. Defendant United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) is a federal law enforcement agency within the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”). ICE is responsible for the administrative enforcement of immigration laws, including the detention and removal of immigrants. Enforcement and Removal Operations (“ERO”), a division of ICE, manages and oversees the immigration detention system.
7. Defendant United States of America manages Defendant ICE and has waived sovereign immunity for claims brought under the Federal Tort claims Act.

Jurisdiction and Venue

8. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction over Plaintiff’s claims under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Alien Tort Statute (“ATS”) pursuant to U.S.C § 1331 (federal question jurisdiction). This Court also has subject matter jurisdiction under the Federal Tort Claims Act (“FTCA”).
9. Venue is proper in this District under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b). A substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in the Eastern District of California.

10. This Court has personal jurisdiction over GEO Group because the corporation regularly conducts business in California and has sufficient minimum contacts with California.

11. Plaintiff requests that this Court exercise supplemental jurisdiction over her California state law claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367.

Factual Allegations

I. Mr. Ahn's Detention and Death

12. This case arises out of the torture and preventable death by suicide of Mr. Ahn, a longtime US resident who was 74 years old at the time of his death.

13. Mr. Ahn was born in South Korea and entered the United States in 1988 as a Lawful Permanent Resident ("LPR"). He lived in the San Francisco Bay Area until the time of his arrest and detention, maintaining LPR status for over three decades, until his death.

14. He was confined to state prison for years. During this time Mr. Ahn developed severe depression and other mental health conditions and attempted suicide at least three times, in 2014, 2015, and 2019.

15. Although the State of California determined that Mr. Ahn should be released to live in the community and granted his early release from prison on parole, on or about February 21, 2020, ERO arrested Mr. Ahn at the

Solano State Prison in Vacaville, California and took him into civil custody.

ERO then transported Mr. Ahn to Mesa Verde.¹

16. Mesa Verde is a federal immigration detention facility.

17. On information and belief, ICE was the landowner of Mesa Verde at all times relevant to this complaint.

18. But, like many federal immigration detention facilities, Mesa Verde is not operated by ICE but rather by a private contractor. In this case, in 2015, ICE contracted GEO Group, through the City of McFarland, to operate Mesa Verde.

19. It was a questionable decision to say the least. Even at the time, GEO Group had poor reputation for managing private prisons and detention centers. Its facilities were known for “inadequate medical care, understaffing, violence, and other issues.”² In 2012 alone, two detainees died while in custody in GEO Group facilities because they received inadequate

¹ Other courts have noted the lack of foundation undergirding current immigration detention practices: “...[I]t would appear we are spending millions of our national treasure to lock up thousands of people who might better be released on strict bail conditions without impairing the safety of our citizens or the operations of our government.” *Savino v. Souza*, 459 F. Supp. 3d 317, 322 (D. Mass. 2020).

² *Fatal Neglect: How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention*, ACLU, Detention Watch Network & National Immigrant Justice Center at 6 (Feb. 2016), available at https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/fatal_neglect_acludwnnjjc.pdf [hereinafter *Fatal Neglect*].

76 medical care.³ A 2012 report by the Department of Justice about a GEO
77 Group-operated prison in Missouri identified “systemic, egregious practices”
78 at the facility, including inadequate medical care.⁴

79 20. GEO Group lived up to its reputation after it gained the contract to
80 operate Mesa Verde. For example, a 2016 report stated: “Although ... GEO
81 ha[s] gone to great lengths to hide information about their medical staffing,
82 the limited information available does indicate that there are frequent and
83 long-term vacancies for contractually-required positions, creating a
84 dangerous administrative limbo which allows facilities to pass inspection
85 while also saving money on personnel costs.”⁵ A 2018 investigation by an
86 inspector general of the nearby Adelanto Detention Center, also operated by
87 GEO Group, found nooses hung in cells.⁶ To date, Mesa Verde has been the

³ *Id.* at 7, 16.

⁴ David M. Reutter, *GEO Group Pulls out of Mississippi Prisons*, Prison Legal News (Nov. 15, 2013), available at <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2013/nov/15/geo-group-pulls-out-of-mississippi-prisons/>.

⁵ *A Toxic Relationship: Private Prisons and U.S. Immigration Detention*, Detention Watch Network, at 7 (Dec. 2016), available at https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/A%20Toxic%20Relationship_DWN.pdf.

⁶ Miriam Jordan, *Inspectors Find Nooses in Cells at Immigration Detention Facility*, N.Y. Times (Oct. 2, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/us/oig-inspector-general-adelanto-immigrants-nooses.html>.

subject of numerous lawsuits and federal investigations concerning the substandard medical and mental health treatment provided at the facility.⁷

21. Even so, ICE continued to retain GEO Group to run Mesa Verde, and even renewed their contract in 2019.

22. ICE also continued to have some authority over GEO Group's operation of Mesa Verde—though its authority did not do detainees much good. For example, ICE had the authority to set substantive standards to govern the conditions at GEO, and to enforce those standards through inspections. But ICE's inspections were perfunctory, and checked GEO Group's policies rather than its actual practices. GEO Group was anyways notified of inspections in advance, giving it an opportunity to cover up or obscure issues at its facilities and so pass inspection without having to fix problems.

⁷ “Indeed, the documentary evidence shows that the defendants have avoided widespread testing of staff and detainees at the facility, not for lack of tests, but for fear that positive test results would require them to implement safety measures that they apparently felt were not worth the trouble. This conduct by the defendants has put the detainees at serious risk of irreparable harm. The defendants have also jeopardized the safety of their own employees. And they have endangered the community at large.” *Zepeda Rivas v. Jennings*, Case No. 20-cv-02731-VC, ECF 500 at p. 1 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 6, 2020).

101 23. The inspections were also generally unreliable, as inspections by
102 different divisions of ICE could come to inconsistent conclusions.⁸ Even
103 worse, across multiple facilities, GEO Group regularly passed ICE
104 inspection even when its facilities were dangerous and inhumane.⁹

105 24. For example, three inspections in 2016 and 2017 concluded that GEO
106 Group met all standards at Mesa Verde related to suicide prevention and
107 intervention—a conclusion that, given what happened to Mr. Ahn, is highly
108 doubtful.

109 25. To sum up, when ICE picked Mr. Ahn up from Solano prison and
110 deposited him at Mesa Verde in February 2020, the agency was entrusting
111 his health, safety, and wellbeing to GEO Group: a private contractor with a
112 track-record of poor performance, operating a very dangerous and risky kind
113 of facility, under virtually no oversight.

114 26. That trust was undeserved. When Mr. Ahn entered Mesa Verde in
115 February 2020, he was only offered a cursory mental health screening and

⁸ *Lives in Peril: How Ineffective Inspections Make ICE Complicit in Immigration Detention Abuse*, The Immigration Detention Transparency and Human Rights Project, at 13 (Oct. 2015), available at <https://immigrantjustice.org/sites/default/files/content-type/research-item/documents/2017-03/THR-Inspections-FOIA-Report-October-2015-FINAL.pdf>

⁹ *Id.* at 4; *Fatal Neglect* at 3.

his records were not examined to determine the extent of his mental illnesses or identify past suicidal ideation and past suicide attempts.

27. As Mr. Ahn remained at Mesa Verde, staff realized what would have been apparent from his records: that Mr. Ahn was severely depressed, experienced regular suicidal ideation, and had attempted suicide three times in detention settings.

28. On March 12, 2020, Mr. Ahn reported experiencing shortness of breath and chest pain, and was admitted to the emergency department of Mercy Hospital in Bakersfield, California. He received emergency surgery to remove a mass on his lung.

29. At the time Mr. Ahn was distressed and despondent, believing that he had been diagnosed with lung cancer.

30. The hospital requested that Mr. Ahn return shortly for follow up care and to confirm the biopsy results. But ICE delayed authorizing and scheduling the appointment for months.

31. Mr. Ahn never received the follow up treatment or biopsy results.

32. Then, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit California. The CDC warned immediately, from the very beginning of the pandemic, that congregate settings created a high risk for COVID-19 transmission. Mesa

Verde was undeniably one such setting: it housed detainees in four 100-person dorms, and had virtually no possibility for social distancing.

33. The need for a COVID-19 plan or pandemic protocols was immediate and serious. But neither ICE nor GEO Group took even the minimum steps that the situation required. In fact, by July 2020, there was still no facility-specific plan in place at Mesa Verde.

34. ICE also declined to exercise even its most basic kind of authority—to release detainees who were at risk and posed no threat to public safety—in order to reduce the population density at Mesa Verde and protect the health of the detainees that remained there. As the pandemic progressed, Mesa Verde remained far too full, and far too lax about detainee safety.

35. Detainees noticed, and were afraid. On April 10, Mr. Ahn joined a peaceful hunger strike occurring in his dormitory and began refusing meals to protest the conditions at Mesa Verde.

36. In April 2020, during a mental health appointment, Mr. Ahn reported to a psychologist employed by GEO Group that he had feelings of sadness and low energy, as well as trouble sleeping. The psychologist concluded that Mr. Ahn had an unspecified depressive disorder and referred him to a psychiatrist.

154 37. Later that same month, Mr. Ahn informed Mesa Verde medical staff
155 that he had attempted suicide at least three different times while in custody,
156 in 2014, 2015, and 2019.

157 38. On April 30, 2020, Mr. Ahn reported to mental health staff in a “talk
158 therapy” session that his depression was “6-7/10 (10 being the worst).” He
159 expressed feelings of anxiety and not “want[ing] to live in this life.”

160 39. Mr. Ahn continued to become more distressed and despondent because
161 of the conditions inside Mesa Verde, and in particular, their now well-
162 documented and dangerous mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰

163 40. Mr. Ahn submitted at least three requests for release to ICE through his
164 lawyers. Each time, ICE declined to release this 74-year-old detainee with

¹⁰ See, e.g., *Joint Statement by the detained people at Mesa Verde* (Aug. 6, 2020), <https://www.centrolegal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/MV-COVID-19-Outbreak-Statement.pdf> (Mesa Verde detainees reporting that as of early August 2020, “new people continued to arrive in our dorms, straight from prisons with massive COVID-19 outbreaks, without being quarantined or even tested for the virus”); *Zepeda Rivas v. Jennings*, No. 20-cv-02731-VC, 2020 WL 3055449 at *4 (N.D. Cal. June 9, 2020) (ordering ICE to close intake at Mesa Verde and commenting that ICE’s conduct “since the pandemic began ha[s] shown beyond doubt that ICE cannot currently be trusted to prevent constitutional violations at [Mesa Verde] without judicial intervention.” and further finding that ICE did not regularly quarantine or test detainees transferred from COVID-19-infected prisons upon intake at Mesa Verde, but rather brought them directly into dormitories); *Zepeda Rivas v. Jennings*, No. 20-CV-02731-VC, 2020 WL 4554646, at *1 (N.D. Cal. Aug. 6, 2020) (ordering ICE to stop incoming transfers to Mesa Verde).

serious mental illness and multiple co-morbidities, including diabetes and heart disease.

41. On May 11, 2020, Mr. Ahn wept and then fell into a despondent silence upon learning that his latest request for release had been denied, commenting to others that he would never get out of detention.

42. On May 12, 2020, Mr. Ahn was admitted to Mercy Hospital in Bakersfield due to chest pain.

43. Throughout his detention at Mesa Verde, Mr. Ahn made several medical requests due to persistent pain in his feet, his shoulder, and his chest.

44. Further, his diabetes and high blood pressure medication were not refilled in a timely manner, and he made several complaints regarding this lack of proper treatment.

45. On the day Mr. Ahn was hospitalized, he was struggling to breathe, complaining of chest pain, and had liquid coming out of his nose.

46. Mr. Ahn returned to Mesa Verde on May 14, 2020, after receiving a negative COVID-19 test.

47. Despite the fact that he had tested negative, Mr. Ahn was placed in a solitary isolation unit upon his return with no legitimate purpose identified for this isolation.

185 48. Despite Mr. Ahn’s current mental state, diagnosed depression, and past
186 suicide attempts, he was placed in a solitary cell with a “tie off point” and
187 bed sheet, and no human contact.

188 49. The availability of a tie off point and bed sheet or other rope-like
189 device are high risk factors for suicide attempts when paired with the mental
190 health diagnosis and suicide-attempt history of Mr. Ahn.

191 50. Even if GEO Group’s staff had reason to suspect that Mr. Ahn had
192 contracted COVID, his placement in solitary confinement would have been
193 unwarranted and dangerous, particularly for someone with Mr. Ahn’s mental
194 health conditions and history of suicidality. At the time, public health
195 experts warned against ICE’s “practice . . . of locking people in conditions .
196 . . equivalent to punitive solitary confinement . . . as a form of ‘quarantine’
197 or ‘medical isolation’” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it
198 subjected detained people to “significant risk of grave harm (including harm
199 that may be permanent, even fatal).” Citing “widely accepted” scientific
200 consensus, experts explained that “ICE detainees with pre-existing mental
201 illness or emotional impairment are especially at risk”; when “placed in
202 conditions that are the equivalent of solitary confinement” they are
203 “especially likely to suffer an exacerbation of their psychiatric disability,”
204 rendering them “even more medically and psychologically vulnerable.”

205 51. Experts concluded that solitary confinement is by design an
206 “inappropriate, ill-conceived, and counter-productive” tool for quarantine.
207 Among other things, detainees held in solitary often lack access to adequate
208 medical care and hygiene supplies “even more acute[ly]” than in the general
209 population, surfaces may be unsanitary, and without the use of negative
210 pressure rooms, the virus can still easily spread through airborne
211 transmission. As such, this practice “very likely exacerbate[s] rather than
212 limit[s] or alleviate[s] the spread of COVID-19” in ICE facilities. Medical
213 professionals have further highlighted Mr. Ahn’s case as illustrating how
214 “preemptive lockdowns” in a “solitary confinement” setting, marked by
215 “extreme isolation and stark conditions,” pose “grave dangers to [detained
216 persons’] mental and physical health” and threaten “needless suffering and
217 loss of life.”

218 52. Moreover, even though GEO placed Mr. Ahn in solitary as an alleged
219 COVID-19 safety measure, ICE and GEO were at the time still regularly
220 accepting incoming transfers of detainees from California prisons with
221 confirmed outbreaks of COVID-19, and placing them directly in the
222 dormitories at Mesa Verde, without requiring quarantining or regular testing.

223 53. This practice continued for months after Mr. Ahn’s death, until a
224 federal court ordered ICE and GEO Group to stop, finding that their

inadequate testing and quarantine protocols likely violated the Fifth Amendment rights of all detainees.

54. After he was placed in solitary, Mr. Ahn informed the psychologist that he had feelings of depression.

55. Nevertheless, staff held Mr. Ahn in isolation and failed to investigate any alternative housing placement that would accommodate Mr. Ahn's mental state.

56. At this point, because of his isolation, Mr. Ahn began expressing his suicidal ideation to people beyond medical staff, including his brother, Young Ahn.

57. On May 16, 2020, a clinical psychologist subcontracted by GEO Group reported that Mr. Ahn appeared to be at "high suicidal risk if deported."

58. On the morning of May 17, 2020, an attorney for Mr. Ahn emailed ICE, requesting that the agency return him to his dormitory because isolation was proving detrimental to his mental health.

59. Also on May 17, 2020, a contracted medical provider employed by the company Wellpath indicated that Mr. Ahn's mental illness was "severe" and again stated that Mr. Ahn was at "high risk of suicide if deported."

60. At that point, along with his extreme isolation, Mr. Ahn faced the imminent threat of deportation. His next scheduled hearing in his removal

proceedings was May 19, 2020, and he remained uncounseled in his removal proceedings.

61. Despite the deteriorating and well-documented state of Mr. Ahn's mental health, and despite internal policies directing otherwise, on the evening of Sunday, May 17, 2020, GEO Group staff left Mr. Ahn unobserved in the isolation cell with access to bed sheets and a tie off point.

62. During the period when he was unobserved, Mr. Ahn died by hanging himself with a bedsheet.

63. On that day, Sylvia Ahn permanently lost her father.

II. Presentment of Claims

64. On May 17, 2022, Plaintiff submitted an administrative claim to ICE under the FTCA (**Exhibit B**). The claim alleged that ICE falsely imprisoned Mr. Ahn, inflicted on him intentional emotional distress, and caused his death through its negligence.

65. On October 11, 2022, ICE denied Plaintiff's administrative claim (**Exhibit C**).

III. Applicable Standards and Protocols

66. ICE has authority to set standards for privately-operated detention facilities through its contracts and has set such standards.

266 67. Among other standards, GEO Group is subject to Performance-Based
267 National Detention Standards 2011 (PBNDS 2011). So is ICE.

268 68. PBNDS impose standards and protocols for, *inter alia*, detainees at risk
269 of suicide and detainees with disabilities.

270 69. Under those standards, Defendants ICE and GEO Group are required to
271 identify detainees with a risk of suicide or self-harm in an initial screening,
272 to be conducted within 12 hours of admission. 2011 PBNDS 4.6 Significant
273 Self Harm and Suicide Prevention and Intervention.

274 70. Defendants also must remain vigilant in recognizing and reporting
275 detainees who show a risk of suicide or self-harm any time after admission.

276 71. Once a detainee is identified as at-risk of suicide or self-harm,
277 Defendants must refer the detainee for an evaluation by a mental health
278 provider within 24 hours.

279 72. In between the identification and evaluation, Defendants must place the
280 detainee in a secure environment with one-to-one visual observation.

281 73. A qualified mental health professional must conduct the evaluation.
282 The professional must determine the level of risk, level of supervision
283 needed, a treatment plan, and the potential need for transfer to an inpatient
284 mental health facility. The professional's evaluation must rely, among other

things, upon the detainee's relevant history, diagnoses, and environmental factors.

74. The professional may place the detainee in a special isolation room designed for evaluation and treatment with continuous monitoring that must be documented every 15 minutes or more frequently if necessary. The isolation room must be suicide-resistant, including that it be free from any features that could facilitate a suicide attempt.

75. If there is no special isolation room available, then the suicidal detainee may be temporarily placed in a special management unit. While in that unit, the detainee shall have access to all programs and services that are available to the general population, to the maximum extent possible. Detainees on suicide precautions who have not been placed in a special isolation room should receive documented close observations at least every 15 minutes.

76. The protocols also impose training obligations. Defendants must provide all facility staff members who interact with and/or are responsible for detainees with comprehensive training initially during orientation and repeated at least annually, on effective methods for identifying significant self-harm, as well as suicide prevention and intervention with detainees. Initial training should consist of at least eight hours of instruction, and subsequent annual trainings should be a minimum of two hours.

305 77. PBNDS 2011 also details protocols for detainees with disabilities. 2011
306 PBNDS 4.8.

307 78. A detainee is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment
308 that substantially limits a major life activity, or if they have a record of such
309 an impairment.

310 79. To identify a detainee with a disability, Defendants shall consider
311 information submitted by a third party, including an attorney, family
312 member, or other detainee in order to identify detainees with disabilities.

313 80. Defendants are also required to identify detainees whose impairments
314 are “open, obvious, and apparent.” This kind of identification may occur
315 through medical or intake screenings, or direct observation.

316 81. Upon identifying a detainee with a disability, the facility must review
317 the detainee for necessary accommodations.

318 82. If the detainee’s disability accommodations are “complex or best
319 addressed by staff from more than one discipline (e.g., security,
320 programming, medical, or mental health, etc.),” then the accommodation
321 should be reviewed by a multidisciplinary team.

322 83. Defendants may deny accommodations to a detainee only if the
323 detainee can access the facility’s programs, services, or activities without
324 them; there is no relationship between the disability and the accommodation;

the accommodation would fundamentally alter the program or impose an undue burden; or the detainee poses a direct threat to staff or other detainees.

84. As with self-harm and suicide, PBNDS 2011 imposes obligations on Defendants to train their staff on these requirements. Staff must receive the information during an orientation training, and then annually thereafter.

CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

COUNT ONE: WRONGFUL DEATH ***Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group***

85. Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

86. “The elements of a wrongful death claim are: (1) a wrongful act or neglect that (2) causes (3) the death of another person.” *Estate of Vela v. County of Monterey*, 2018 WL 4076317, at *13 (N.D. Cal. 2018) (citing Cal. Civ. P. Code § 377.60 and *Norgart v. Upjohn Co.*, 21 Cal. 4th 383, 390 (1999)).

87. Wrongful acts include “any kind of tortious act.” *Barrett v. Superior Court*, 222 Cal. App. 3d 1176, 1191 (1990). Because detainees are helpless to protect themselves while in the custody and control of an immigration detention facility, GEO Group owes detainees a heightened duty of care. *See, Edison v. U.S.*, 822 F.3d 510, 521-22 (9th Cir. 2016).

348 88. Wrongful acts also include constitutional violations. *See, e.g.,*
349 *Villarreal v. Cty. of Monterey*, 254 F. Supp. 3d 1168, 1191 (N.D. Cal. 2017)
350 (deliberate indifference to medical needs is a “wrongful act”).

351 89. Here, GEO Group:

352 a. Failed to identify Mr. Ahn as disabled or at-risk for suicide or self-
353 harm during an initial screening. GEO Group staff failed, during that
354 screening, to effectively inquire into Mr. Ahn’s relevant medical
355 history and prior suicide attempts.

356 b. Failed to identify Mr. Ahn as disabled or at-risk of suicide or self-
357 harm at any time after his initial screening, despite Mr. Ahn’s
358 repeated statements expressing feelings of depression, anxiety, low
359 energy, and possible suicidal ideation, including to GEO Group staff.

360 c. Failed to provide Mr. Ahn with a necessary mental health evaluation
361 or treatment.

362 d. Locked Mr. Ahn into a solitary confinement cell, despite the fact that
363 GEO Group staff knew that Mr. Ahn had mental illness, and that
364 isolating a person with mental illness causes their condition to
365 deteriorate and creates a substantial risk of self-harm or suicide.

366 Locking Mr. Ahn in solitary confinement also denied him a safe place

to sleep by reason of his disability, when he could have been housed elsewhere.

e. Failed to inspect the cell for any implements that could facilitate self-harm or suicide, and so left the cell with a bed sheet and tie-off point.

f. Failed to appropriately observe Mr. Ahn in accordance with the observation needs and requirements for someone with Mr. Ahn's mental health conditions.

90. These acts and omissions constitute negligence, negligence per se, violations of federal disability law, and violations of the U.S. Constitution.

91. The negligent acts and omissions were performed by GEO Group and its agents or employees who acted within the scope of their employment for GEO Group.

92. It was reasonably foreseeable that these acts and omissions would place Mr. Ahn at substantial risk of self-harm or suicide, and these acts and omissions proximately caused Mr. Ahn's death.

93. Mr. Ahn's death caused Sylvia Ahn, the Plaintiff, to lose her father and resulted in pain and suffering from that loss.

94. Because GEO Group's negligence, negligence per se, and recklessness proximately caused Mr. Ahn's death, California law allows Plaintiff, his daughter, to recover for the full value of Plaintiff's life, and to seek punitive

damages in these circumstances, which present wanton, reckless, and
depraved actions by GEO Group, which will continue to claim the lives of
people locked inside its facilities in the absence of judicial opprobrium and
punishment by a jury.

**COUNT TWO: DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION – VIOLATION OF
THE REHABILITATION ACT**
Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group

95. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the
foregoing paragraphs.

96. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794, prohibits
discrimination on the basis of disability in (1) any program or activity
receiving federal financial assistance; or (2) under any program or
activity conducted by any Executive agency or the United States Postal
Service. 29 U.S.C. § 794.

97. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires covered parties to
provide “reasonable accommodations” to individuals with disabilities so
they can fully participate in benefits administered by these agencies. 29
U.S.C. § 794(a).

98. DHS regulations implementing the Rehabilitation Act mandate that
“[n]o qualified individual with a disability in the United States, shall, by

reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity conducted by the Department.” 6 C.F.R. § 15.30; see also 29 U.S.C. § 794(a).

99. The regulations implementing Section 504 prohibit entities receiving federal financial assistance from utilizing “criteria or methods of administration (i) that have the effect of subjecting qualified handicapped persons to discrimination on the basis of handicap, (ii) that have the purpose or effect of defeating or substantially impairing the accomplishment of the objectives of the recipient’s program or activity with respect to handicapped persons.” 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(4).

100. The removal proceedings are a benefit or program administered by DHS and Mr. Ahn was entitled to participate in the removal process. The services, programs, and activities within the detention centers where DHS detained Mr. Ahn receive substantial federal financial assistance.

101. GEO Group operates a program or activity at Mesa Verde by contract with and for ICE and it receives federal financial assistance for this operation.

102. GEO Group’s federal financial assistance also includes subsidies that the corporation receives in connection with its Voluntary Work Program for

429 federal immigration detainees housed at GEO Group facilities, through
430 which: (a) the United States authorizes GEO Group to use detainees to
431 perform essential work at wages far, far below market rates, work that GEO
432 Group would otherwise be required to carry out with additional staff hired
433 from the community at market rates, thus providing GEO Group with a
434 significant financial benefit; and (b) the United States provides GEO Group
435 a stipend of \$1 per day for each detainee who participates in the Voluntary
436 Work Program. *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1555(d); 2011 Performance-Based National
437 Detention Standards, Section 5.8, Voluntary Work Program, available
438 online: <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/detention-standards/2011/5-8.pdf> (Last
439 accessed June 17, 2022).

440 103. Additionally, GEO Group's federal financial assistance includes
441 subsidies that the corporation receives in connection with revenues obtained
442 through commissary. In its Intergovernmental Service Agreement with GEO
443 Group to operate Mesa Verde, ICE authorizes GEO Group to use the excess
444 revenues from detainees' purchases of commissary items to offset staff
445 salaries that GEO Group would have otherwise been required to pay in-full.

446 104. GEO Group also receives federal financial assistance by providing
447 their officers free staff meals prepared by detainees through the food budget
448 allocated by ICE.

449 105. All operations in Mesa Verde are considered a “program, service, or
450 activity.” The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines a “program or activity” as
451 “*all of the operations* of . . . a department, agency, . . . or instrumentality of
452 a State or of a local government.” 29 U.S.C. § 794(b)(1)(A) (emphasis
453 added). It also includes “*all of the operations* of . . . an entire corporation . . .
454 which is principally engaged in the business of providing education, health
455 care, housing, social services, or parks and recreation,” or “the entire plant
456 or other comparable, geographically separate facility to which Federal
457 financial assistance is extended, in the case of any other corporation.” 29
458 U.S.C. § 794(b)(3)(A) and (B) (emphasis added). This includes *all*
459 *operations* of an “entity which is established by two or more of the entities.”
460 29 U.S.C. § 794(b)(4) (emphasis added).

461 106. In its Component Self-Evaluation and Planning Reference Guide,
462 DHS acknowledges that its “federal conducted programs” include “operation
463 of immigration detention facilities.”

464 107. The DHS document further states that “[a] Component’s activities
465 carried out through contracts are considered conducted activities and are
466 subject to the same obligation [of complying with the Rehabilitation Act].”
467 *Id.* See also Instruction on Nondiscrimination for Individuals with
468 Disabilities in DHS Conducted Programs and Activities (Non-Employment),

DHS Directives System Instruction No. 065-01-001 (defining conducted activities of DHS to include “those carried out through contractual or licensing arrangements”).

108. Additionally, Congress has required ICE to ensure contractors like GEO Group fully implement the programmatic guarantees of the PBNDS 2011.

109. As administered by contractual agreement at Mesa Verde, the PBNDS constitutes a federal program under the authority of 8 U.S.C. § 1103(a)(11) that ensures access to services including safe sleeping facilities, telephone calls, adequate medical, dental, and mental health care (including outside care), recreation, commissary, law library, visitation, counsel, and appropriate classification in civil immigration detention. Mr. Ahn was entitled to all of the benefits administered by GEO Group through PBNDS and their contract terms.

110. The removal proceedings are also a benefit or program administered by DHS and Mr. Ahn was entitled to participate in this removal process. The federal benefit provided by GEO Group at Mesa Verde includes ensuring detained immigrants like Mr. Ahn have meaningful access to and participation in the adjudication of the charges justifying their detention at Mesa Verde, determination of their eligibility for release from custody

489 pending resolution of those charges, and adjudication of their claims for
490 relief in removal proceedings conducted by the Department of Justice's
491 Executive Office for Immigration Review. *See generally* 8 U.S.C. §§ 1229
492 (setting forth rights of noncitizens against who the government initiates
493 removal proceedings), 1229a(b)(4), 1229a(c)(2)(B), 1229a(c)(4).

494 111. Mr. Ahn was an individual with a disability. He had diabetes and heart
495 disease, serious illnesses that put patients at a high risk of serious injury or
496 death from COVID-19. He also had depression and a history of suicide
497 attempts. These conditions qualify as disabilities for purposes of the
498 Rehabilitation Act. 29 U.S.C. §705(2)(B); 42 U.S.C. § 12102.

499 112. In February 2020, ICE, through its subdivision, ERO, took custody of
500 Mr. Ahn and transported him to Mesa Verde. GEO Group then took custody
501 of Mr. Ahn. Despite binding, non-discretionary corporate and contractual
502 policies regarding identification of individuals with serious mental illness or
503 other special vulnerabilities upon a person's admission to Mesa Verde, GEO
504 Group facility administrators conducted only a cursory interview of Mr. Ahn
505 and failed to initially identify Mr. Ahn's serious mental health issues.

506 113. GEO Group discriminated against Mr. Ahn because of his disability in
507 myriad interconnected ways:

- 508 a. First, GEO Group prevented Mr. Ahn from accessing basic services
509 such as a safe living space, toilets, recreation, timely medical care or
510 other programming without risk of death from heightened exposure to
511 COVID-19. Mr. Ahn requested an accommodation of his disabilities
512 repeatedly when he made requests for release and all of those requests
513 for accommodation were denied.
- 514 b. Second, GEO Group discriminated against Mr. Ahn when it placed him
515 in an isolation cell despite his mental health conditions. GEO Group
516 failed to provide Mr. Ahn with the service or benefit of a safe living
517 space without tie-off points, given his well-documented history with
518 suicidal ideation. While isolated, GEO Group prevented Mr. Ahn
519 from accessing their programs, services, or activities, including the
520 removal process, by taking actions that foreseeably would lead to Mr.
521 Ahn's death because of his disability.
- 522 c. GEO Group failed to provide Mr. Ahn the reasonable accommodation
523 of a room that was regularly observed and devoid of implements with
524 which one could affect a suicide attempt.
- 525 d. GEO Group failed to provide Mr. Ahn with appropriate mental health
526 services or accommodations, despite Mr. Ahn's long history with
527 depression and suicidal thoughts. As such, he was not given equal

528 access to the removal proceedings or programming as individuals
529 without disabilities.

530 e. Further, GEO Group failed to consider the appropriateness of less-
531 restrictive alternatives to solitary confinement for individuals like Mr.
532 Ahn with serious mental illness. They failed to consider this even
533 though there was no legitimate purpose behind isolating Mr. Ahn
534 initially (as he had a negative COVID-19 test). GEO Group's policies
535 and ICE's contract require the facility administrator and
536 interdisciplinary staff to conduct regular, periodic reviews of people in
537 solitary confinement who suffer from mental health-related
538 disabilities, and to consider them for release to general population.

539 f. GEO Group's COVID-19 and isolation policies and practices manifest
540 deliberate intentional discrimination and/or deliberate indifference to
541 the likelihood that detainees with serious mental health conditions
542 would suffer illegal discrimination at Mesa Verde.

543 g. GEO Group further failed to ensure that its staff had appropriate
544 training for responding to detained migrants, like Mr. Ahn, who
545 suffered from depression and suicidality.

114. GEO Group’s disability discrimination in violation of the Rehabilitation Act caused Mr. Ahn’s emotional distress, deterioration, and death.

115. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest as defined in Section 377.11 of the California Code of Civil Procedure and seeks survival damages for the violation of Decedent’s rights.

**COUNT THREE: VIOLATION OF THE LAW OF NATIONS UNDER
THE ALIEN TORT STATUTE FOR TORTURE & CRUEL, INHUMANE
AND DEGRADING TREATMENT**
Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group

116. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

117. The Alien Tort Statute (“ATS”), enacted in 1789, permits non-citizens to bring suit in U.S. courts for violations of the law of nations or a treaty of the United States. Under the ATS, federal courts are authorized to recognize a common-law cause of action for violations of clearly defined, widely accepted human rights norms.

118. The United States has signed and ratified with reservations, understanding, and declarations (“RUDs”) binding treaties banning punishment of prolonged solitary confinement and solitary confinement of

persons with mental illness for any period because it constitutes cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (“CIDT”) and torture.

119. The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (“CAT”) constitutes a clearly defined, widely accepted human rights treaty obligation that the United States has signed and ratified (with RUDs), ratified October 21, 1994, 1465 U.N.T.S. 85 (entered into force June 26, 1987).

120. The United States, as a state party to the CAT, has implemented its obligations in domestic law. *See, e.g.*, 8 C.F.R. § 208.18.

121. Articles 1(1) and 16(1) of the CAT define torture and require the United States to prevent it and CIDT within its jurisdiction.

122. The United States has adopted with RUDs the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“ICCPR”). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 7, ratified June 8, 1992, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force March 23, 1976)

123. Art. 7 of the ICCPR states: “No one shall be subjected to torture or [CIDT] or punishment”, and Art. 4(2) establishes this as a non-derogable peremptory norm.

124. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other CIDT has stated that the “imposition, of solitary confinement of any duration, on persons

with mental disabilities is cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. (A/66/268, paras. 67-68, 78). Moreover, any restraint on people with mental disabilities for even a short period of time may constitute torture and ill-treatment.”
Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other [CIDT], Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, ¶ 63, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/22/53 (Feb. 1, 2013) Juan Mendez.

125. Defendant GEO Group’s conduct described herein constitutes torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, a violation of “specific, universal, and obligatory” international law norms, as evidenced by numerous binding international treaties, declarations, and other international law instruments. Accordingly, Defendant’s conduct is actionable under the ATS.

126. GEO Group tortured Mr. Ahn to death and subjected him to CIDT by intentionally inflicting severe physical and mental pain and suffering upon him for no facially legitimate purpose.

127. Specifically, GEO Group supervisors ordered Mr. Ahn’s placement in solitary confinement for medical quarantine despite a negative COVID-19 test and no legitimate or consistent justification for such confinement.

128. GEO Group did this despite being specifically aware of Mr. Ahn’s diagnosis of unspecified depression and his, at least, three prior suicide

608 attempts. They also placed him in solitary confinement despite having
609 recently identified his mental illness as “severe.”

610 129. GEO Group personnel knew that time in solitary confinement,
611 particularly for someone in Mr. Ahn’s condition, would inflict severe
612 psychological pain and put Mr. Ahn at an acute risk of suicide.

613 130. Indeed, as a matter of corporate policy, every GEO Group detention
614 officer at Mesa Verde is required to receive suicide prevention training that
615 specifically warns of the acute risks of solitary confinement for people with
616 past histories of suicidal ideation, involuntary commitment, or diagnoses like
617 the one conferred on Mr. Ahn by the GEO Group’s own physicians.

618 131. Painfully aware of the specific form of acute suffering and harm
619 segregation would inflict on a detained person with depression, suicidal
620 ideation and past suicide attempts, GEO Group intentionally condemned Mr.
621 Ahn to the acute psychological, emotional, and physical pain and suffering.

622 132. GEO Group’s torture and CIDT of Mr. Ahn caused his death.

623 133. Additionally, GEO Group provided Mr. Ahn the means and
624 opportunity to effectuate his suicide by refraining from observing Mr. Ahn
625 during the period when he died and by placing Mr. Ahn in a solitary
626 confinement cell with bed sheets and a tie off point—well known risk
627 factors for suicide.

134. GEO Group’s acts and omissions were deliberate, willful, intentional, wanton, malicious, oppressive, and in conscious disregard for Mr. Ahn’s rights under international and U.S. law and should be punished by an award of punitive damages in an amount to be determined at trial.

135. No absolute or qualified immunity exists to shield GEO group from liability.

136. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

COUNT FOUR: NEGLIGENCE OR NEGLIGENCE PER SE
Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group

137. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

138. “The elements of a negligence claim under California law are duty, breach, causation, and injury.” *Stasi v. Inmediata Health Group Corp.*, 501 F.Supp.3d 898, 912 (S.D. Cal. 2020) (citing *Vasilenko v. Grace Family Church*, 3 Cal. 5th 1077 (2017)).

139. Because detainees are helpless to protect themselves while in the custody and control of an immigration detention facility, GEO Group owes detainees a heightened duty of care. *See, Edison*, 822 F.3d at 521–22.

140. Here, GEO Group:

- 649 a. Failed to identify Mr. Ahn as at-risk for suicide or self-harm during an
650 initial screening, including because Defendant failed, during that
651 screening, to effectively inquire into Mr. Ahn's relevant medical
652 history and prior suicide attempts.
- 653 b. Failed to identify Mr. Ahn as at-risk of suicide or self-harm at any
654 time after his initial screening, despite Mr. Ahn's repeated statements
655 expressing feelings of depression, anxiety, low energy, and possible
656 suicidal ideation, including to GEO Group staff.
- 657 c. Failed to provide Mr. Ahn with a timely and adequate mental health
658 evaluation or treatment.
- 659 d. Locked Mr. Ahn into a solitary confinement cell, despite the fact that
660 Mr. Ahn had mental illness, and isolating a person with mental illness
661 causes their condition to deteriorate and creates a substantial risk of
662 self-harm or suicide.
- 663 e. Failed to inspect the cell for any implements that could facilitate self-
664 harm or suicide, and so left the cell with a bed sheet and tie-off point.
- 665 f. Failed to appropriately observe Mr. Ahn in accordance with the
666 observation needs and requirements for someone with Mr. Ahn's
667 mental health conditions.

668 141. These acts and omissions constitute negligence and negligence per se.

142. The negligent acts and omissions were performed by GEO Group and its agents or employees who acted within the scope of their employment for GEO Group.

143. It was reasonably foreseeable that these acts and omissions would place Mr. Ahn in emotional distress prior to his death and at substantial risk of self-harm or suicide, and these acts and omissions proximately caused Mr. Ahn's death.

144. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

**COUNT FIVE: INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL
DISTRESS**

Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group

145. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

146. Intentional infliction of emotional distress encompasses "(1) extreme and outrageous conduct by the defendant with the intention of causing, or reckless disregard of the probability of causing, emotional distress; (2) the plaintiff's suffering severe or extreme emotional distress; (3) and actual and proximate causation of the emotional distress by the defendant's outrageous conduct." *Pardi v. Kaiser Foundation Hospitals*, 389 F.3d 840, 852 (9th Cir. 2004) (quoting *Cervantez v. J.C. Penney Co.*, 24 Cal.3d 579, 593 (1979)) (internal quotations omitted).

692 147. GEO Group staff committed extreme and outrageous conduct against
693 Mr. Ahn when they, despite being aware of his mental health condition,
694 placed him in an isolation cell that they knew, or should have known, would
695 exacerbate his condition.

696 148. This conduct was further extreme and outrageous because it was done
697 with full knowledge of at least three past suicide attempts and because the
698 isolation cell into which GEO Group staff placed Mr. Ahn was furnished
699 with implements with which one could die by suicide.

700 149. GEO Group additionally committed extreme and outrageous conduct
701 when they failed to observe Mr. Ahn as required in the isolation cell.

702 150. Because of Mr. Ahn's mental health condition, his repeated
703 descriptions of his suicidality, and his past suicide attempts, placing Mr. Ahn
704 in an isolation cell recklessly disregarded the high probability that such
705 placement would cause Mr. Ahn extreme emotional distress.

706 151. It did just that and Mr. Ahn began to emotionally deteriorate as a
707 result of his placement in isolation. As such, GEO Group's actions were the
708 proximate cause of his emotional distress.

709 152. Despite this, at no point did GEO Group release Mr. Ahn from
710 isolation and he continued to suffer increasing levels of severe emotional
711 distress.

153. This distress culminated when Mr. Ahn died by suicide in GEO Group's isolation cell, unobserved by any GEO Group staff.

154. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

**COUNT SIX: NEGLIGENT TRAINING, SUPERVISION, AND
RETENTION**
Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group

155. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

156. An employer is negligent if they fail to adequately train their employees as to the performance of their job duties, and as a result of such negligent instruction, employees while carrying out their job duties caused injury or damage to the plaintiff. *See State Farm Fire & Casualty Co. v. Keenan*, 171 Cal.App.3d 1, 23, 216 Cal. Rptr. 318 (1985).

157. PBNDS 2011 require GEO Group to provide all facility staff members who interact with and/or are responsible for detainees with comprehensive training initially during orientation and repeated at least annually, on effective methods for identifying significant self-harm, as well as suicide prevention and intervention with detainees. Initial training should consist of at least eight hours of instruction, and subsequent annual trainings should be a minimum of two hours.

158. PBNDS 2011 also require GEO Group to train staff as to detainees' disability rights at an initial orientation, and then to refresh staff on the material annually thereafter.

159. GEO Group failed to adequately train its staff as required by PBNDS 2011.

160. In addition, GEO Group failed to adequately train its staff as to: 1) not placing people with mental health conditions in solitary; 2) proper COVID protocols including the lack of need to isolate someone who tested negative for COVID; 3) the need to remove implements from a solitary cell that one could easily use to commit suicide; 4) the protocols for consistent observation of people with depression and past suicide attempts.

161. Those failures constituted negligence and negligence per se.

162. It was reasonably foreseeable that these acts and omissions would place Mr. Ahn at substantial risk of self-harm or suicide, and these acts and omissions proximately caused Mr. Ahn's death.

163. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

**COUNT SEVEN: VIOLATIONS OF CAL. CIVIL CODE § 43, CAL.
CIVIL CODE § 51 (UNRUH)
*Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group***

164. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

758 165. The Unruh Act provides that “[a]ll persons within the jurisdiction of
759 [California] are free and equal, and no matter what their sex, race, color,
760 religion, ancestry, national origin, disability, or medical condition are
761 entitled to the full and equal accommodations, advantages, facilities,
762 privileges, or services in all business establishments of every kind
763 whatsoever.” Cal. Civ. Code § 51(b).

764 166. GEO Group is a “business establishment” subject to the Unruh Act
765 because Defendant is a for-profit business whose “overall function” is to
766 “protect and enhance [its] economic value,” *O’Connor v. Vill. Green*
767 *Owners Assn.*, 33 Cal. 3d 790, 796 (1983), and whose “purpose [is] making
768 a livelihood or gain,” *Ibister*, 40 Cal. 3d 72, 95 (1985). *See also Est. of Silva*
769 *v. City of San Diego*, No. 3:18-CV-2282-L-MSB, 2020 WL 6946011, at *22
770 (S.D. Cal. Nov. 25, 2020) (quoting *O’Connor*, 33 Cal. 3d at 796) (holding
771 that private subcontractors who provided medical services inside county jails
772 were properly subject to the Unruh Act); *also Wilkins-Jones v. Cty. of*
773 *Alameda*, 859 F. Supp. 2d 1039, 1043 (N.D. Cal. 2012) (holding that a
774 private medical contractor is “qualitatively different from a correctional
775 facility itself; while the County’s operation of a jail may not be a business,
776 [the private medical contractor] is a business establishment operating for
777 profit within a correctional facility.”).

167. A violation of an individual’s rights under the ADA constitutes a violation of the Unruh Act. Cal. Civ. Code § 51(f).

168. Title III of the ADA provides: “No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.” 42 U.S.C. § 12182(a).

169. Mr. Ahn is an individual with a disability because he suffered from depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses that substantially limited his ability to perform major life activities, including sleeping, communicating and regular socialization.

170. GEO Group operates Mesa Verde, which is a public accommodation. *See* 42 U.S.C.A. § 12181(7)(K) (listing “social service center establishment[s]” as a kind of public accommodation); *see also Martin v. PGA Tour, Inc.*, 204 F.3d 994, 998 (9th Cir.2000) (Selectivity about who may enter or use the accommodation does not necessarily defeat its public character.)

171. GEO Group locked Mr. Ahn in an isolation cell, exacerbating his mental illness. This conduct denied Mr. Ahn access to a safe place to sleep, which is a program, service, or activity in a detention facility.

798 172. The denial constitutes discrimination against Mr. Ahn on the basis of
799 his disability, because GEO Group failed to provide him with a reasonable
800 accommodation (e.g., a different housing assignment) when one was
801 necessary.

802 173. Mr. Ahn suffered harm as a result of Defendant's acts and omissions.
803 Specifically, Mr. Ahn suffered exacerbation of his mental illness and
804 ultimately his death.

805 174. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

806
807 **COUNT EIGHT: VIOLATIONS OF CAL. CIVIL CODE § 52.1 (BANE**
808 **ACT)**

809 ***Plaintiff against Defendant GEO Group***
810

811 175. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the
812 foregoing paragraphs.

813 176. The Bane Act creates a private right of action against any person
814 (whether or not acting under color of law) who interferes by threat,
815 intimidation, or coercion with the plaintiff's enjoyment of rights created by
816 the U.S. constitution, federal laws, the California constitution, or California
817 state laws. *Reese v. Cnty. of Sacramento*, 888 F.3d 1030, 1040 (9th Cir.
818 2018).

177. The Fifth Amendment guarantees civil detainees a right to adequate medical care. *See Gordon v. Cnty. of Orange*, 888 F.3d 1118, 1125 (9th Cir. 2018) (discussing the right in the context of the Fourteenth Amendment).

178. A civil detainee’s Fifth Amendment rights are violated where: “(i) the defendant made an intentional decision with respect to the conditions under which the plaintiff was confined; (ii) those conditions put the plaintiff at substantial risk of suffering serious harm; (iii) the defendant did not take reasonable available measures to abate that risk, even though a reasonable official in the circumstances would have appreciated the high degree of risk involved—making the consequences of the defendant's conduct obvious; and (iv) by not taking such measures, the defendant caused the plaintiff's injuries.” *Id.*

179. GEO Group interfered with Mr. Ahn’s enjoyment of his substantive due process rights under the Fifth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

180. (i) Defendant made an intentional decision to put Mr. Ahn in solitary confinement on May 14th, 2020, when Mr. Ahn returned from the hospital.

181. Placing Mr. Ahn in a solitary cell constitutes “coercion.” *See Reese*, 888 F.3d at 1040 (The “threat, intimidation or coercion” need not be “transactionally independent from the constitutional violation alleged.”); *B.B. v. County of Los Angeles*, 25 Cal. App. 5th 115, 130 (Cal. Ct. App.

2018), *rev'd on other grounds*, *B.B. v. County of Los Angeles*, 10 Cal. 5th 1 (Cal. 2020).

182. (ii) Because Mr. Ahn was depressive, that decision placed him at substantial risk of harm.

183. (iii) GEO Group did not take reasonable measures to abate that risk, because Defendant did not, among other things, transfer Mr. Ahn out of isolation, to a mental health institution, or place him under one-to-one supervision. In fact, Defendant did nothing at all.

184. GEO Group knew or should have known that Mr. Ahn was depressive: Mr. Ahn reported symptoms of depression to a psychologist in April 2020, and also told the psychologist that he had attempted suicide at least three different times in custody in 2014, 2015, and 2016; GEO Group employees witnessed Mr. Ahn acting abnormally, including being strangely quiet and crying when his release request was denied; Mr. Ahn reported to a psychologist again after being placed in solitary confinement that he had feelings of depression; and on May 16, 2020, a Mesa Verde psychologist said that Mr. Ahn had a high risk of suicide if deported. GEO Group also knew or should have known that solitary confinement was dangerous to Plaintiff, because the risks and adverse consequences of placing a person with mental illness in solitary confinement is well-established. *See, e.g.,*

Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center, et. al., Complaint for violations of civil, constitutional, and disability rights of Anderson Avisai Gutierrez (Mar. 13, 2020), https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-03-13_anderson_avisai_gutierrez_crcl_504_complaint_.pdf (describing cases of detainees who died by suicide following improper placement in segregation); U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Memorandum to Matthew Albence from Veronica Venture regarding Adelanto Correctional Facility Complaints (April 25, 2018), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/adelanto-expert-memo-04-25-18.pdf> at 5 (“Detainees with serious mental disorders should only be housed in administrative segregation as a last resort, as that environment is not conducive to improving mental health status”); Memorandum from Ellen Gallagher, Senior Policy Advisor, DHS CRC. to Deputy Secretary Mayorkas, DHS (July 23, 2014) at 3 (stating that placing individuals in ICE custody who suffer from serious mental health conditions into segregated settings is non-therapeutic and “imposes improper punitive conditions, and subjects vulnerable detainees to physical and mental deterioration”); Justin D. Strong et al., *The body in isolation: The physical health impacts of incarceration in solitary confinement*, PLOS ONE (Oct. 9, 2020),

879 <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238510> (explaining that “solitary
880 confinement is associated not just with mental, but also with physical health
881 problems” and “analyz[ing] a range of physical exacerbated by both
882 restrictive conditions and policies.”). In other words, the consequences of
883 Defendant’s acts and omissions were obvious.

884 185. GEO Group also acted with “specific intent” to deprive Mr. Ahn of
885 his Fifth Amendment rights, because these acts and omissions are also
886 evidence of a “reckless disregard,” if not a knowing interference, of his
887 rights. *See Reese*, 888 F.3d at 1043-45 (citing *Cornell v. City and County of*
888 *San Francisco*, 17 Cal. App. 5th 766, 801 (2017)).

889 186. As a result of GEO Group’s failure to take reasonable measures and
890 move Mr. Ahn out of solitary confinement, Mr. Ahn died by suicide. Mr.
891 Ahn’s depression was exacerbated by isolation and at the time that he
892 effectuated his suicide he was not visible to other detainees or GEO
893 employees who could have intervened.

894 187. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

895
896 **COUNT NINE: NEGLIGENCE – FEDERAL TORTS CLAIMS ACT**
897 **28 U.S.C. §1346(b)**
898 ***Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***
899

900 188. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the
901 foregoing paragraphs.

189. “In order to establish negligence under California law, a plaintiff must establish four required elements: (1) duty; (2) breach; (3) causation; and (4) damages.” *See Ileto v. Glock Inc.*, 349 F.3d 1191, 1203 (9th Cir.2003) (citing *Martinez v. Pac. Bell*, 225 Cal.App.3d 1557, 1564 (1990)). “Although one person is generally under no duty to protect another from harm, an affirmative duty to protect another from harm may arise where a ‘special relationship’ exists between the parties” *Martinez v. GEO Group, Inc.*, 2019 WL 3758026, at *3-4 (C.D. Cal. 2019) (quoting *Tarasoff v. Regents of Univ. of Cal.*, 17 Cal. 3d 425, 435 (1976)). “[I]mportant factors in determining whether a relationship is ‘special’ include vulnerability and dependence.” *Id.* (quoting *Lawson v. Superior Court*, 180 Cal. App. 4th 1372, 1390 (2010) (internal quotations omitted)).

190. ICE owed Mr. Ahn, who was a vulnerable and dependent detainee in its custody, both a duty of reasonable care and a duty to affirmatively protect from harm. ICE breached its duty by declining to release Mr. Ahn from detention during the COVID pandemic. ICE knew or should have known that Mr. Ahn had severe medical problems and serious mental illnesses; that the mental health care provided by GEO Group at Mesa Verde was inadequate; that the pandemic posed particular dangers to Mr. Ahn,

921 especially while he was in custody; and that there were no compelling
922 reasons to refuse release.

923 191. ICE's failure to release Mr. Ahn was unreasonable, and actually and
924 proximately caused Mr. Ahn to suffer extreme mental illness and distress,
925 which led him to commit suicide.

926 192. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the
927 FTCA before filing this claim.

928 193. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

929
930 **COUNT TEN: NEGLIGENT HIRING – FEDERAL TORTS CLAIMS**
931 **ACT 28 U.S.C. §1346(b)**
932 ***Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***
933

934 194. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the
935 foregoing paragraphs.

936 195. An employer is subject to liability if, without exercising reasonable
937 care, they employ a contractor “(a) to do work which will involve a risk of
938 physical harm unless it is skillfully and carefully done, or [¶] (b) to perform
939 any duty which the employer owes to third persons.” And fail to use
940 reasonable care. Restatement Second of Torts § 411. Reasonable care is care
941 that “a reasonable [person] would exercise under the circumstances.” *Golden*
942 *v. Conway*, 55 Cal.App.3d 948, 957, 128 Cal.Rptr. 69 (1976). A defendant
943 has a “special relationship” to a plaintiff that is particularly vulnerable or

dependent on them, and owes that plaintiff an affirmative duty of care. *See, e.g., Martinez*, 2019 WL 3758026, at *3-4 (citations omitted).

196. ICE is liable for negligently hiring GEO Group to operate Mesa Verde. Operating a detention center carries risk of physical harm, because it involves, *inter alia*: locking many people up in the same small space, against their will, away from their friends, families, jobs, and communities, under constant threat of deportation, and without means of providing for their own basic necessities.

197. ICE owed Mr. Ahn a duty of reasonable care, as well as an affirmative duty to protect from harm. ICE breached that duty to Mr. Ahn when it hired GEO Group in 2015 through the City of McFarland. Already at that time, GEO Group had “long been criticized by advocacy organizations, government agencies, and the press for inadequate medical care, understaffing, violence, and other issues.” Among other incidents, before ICE hired GEO Group, a detainee died at the nearby GEO Group-operated Adelanto Detention Facility after receiving what the Office of Detention Oversight described as an “unacceptable level of medical care.” ICE acted unreasonably in hiring GEO Group anyways. And GEO Group then, predictably, failed to maintain safe conditions at Mesa Verde during the

pandemic, failed to provide Mr. Ahn with adequate mental health care, and failed to prevent his suicide.

198. ICE's decision to hire GEO Group was the actual and proximate cause of Mr. Ahn's severe mental and emotional distress and eventual suicide.

199. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the FTCA before filing this claim.

200. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

**COUNT ELEVEN: NEGLIGENT SUPERVISION & RETENTION –
FEDERAL TORTS CLAIMS ACT 28 U.S.C. §1346(b)
*Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***

201. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the foregoing paragraphs.

202. An employer “who entrusts work to an independent contractor, but who retains control of any part of the work, is subject to liability for physical harm to others for whose safety the employer owes a duty to exercise reasonable care, which is caused by his failure to exercise his control with reasonable care.” Restatement Second of Torts § 414.

203. ICE owed Mr. Ahn, who was a detainee in its custody, a duty of reasonable care and an affirmative duty to protect from harm. *See, e.g.,*

984 *Martinez*, 2019 WL 3758026, at *3-4. ICE breached that duty by failing to
985 exercise its control over GEO Group with sufficient care. For example:

- 986 a. ICE had authority to set standards and enforce compliance through
987 inspections. But ICE's inspections were perfunctory and unreliable,
988 and did not identify the deficiencies with GEO Group's medical or
989 mental health care, or suicide prevention protocols.
- 990 b. ICE had authority to penalize GEO Group for failing to meet
991 standards, to decline to renew the contract in 2019, or to terminate the
992 contract. ICE took none of those actions, even though it knew or
993 should have known about the unsafe conditions at Mesa Verde and
994 other GEO Group-operated facilities.
- 995 c. ICE had authority to implement COVID-19 protocols, but failed to
996 impose adequate safety measures. ICE also had authority to decide
997 how many people were detained at Mesa Verde. Despite the
998 dangerous conditions that the pandemic created at Mesa Verde, and
999 despite the strain on the facility's resources, ICE failed to reduce the
1000 density, heightening the risk of infection and straining the facility's
1001 resources.

204. ICE’s failure to use reasonable care in supervising GEO Group, particularly given the risks created by the pandemic, actually and proximately caused Mr. Ahn’s severe mental distress and eventual suicide.

205. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the FTCA before filing this claim.

206. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

**COUNT TWELVE: NEGLIGENCE FOR NONDELEGABLE DUTIES –
FEDERAL TORTS CLAIMS ACT 28 U.S.C. §1346(b)
*Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***

207. Even when the United States hires and delegates certain duties to an independent contractor, it may be held directly liable for breaching nondelegable duties. *See Edison*, 822 F.3d at 519 (“[E]ven if it appears that the government delegated all of its duties to the independent contractor, we ask whether California law imposed any *nondelegable* duties on the government.”). The government retains a nondelegable duty of care to ensure a safe environment when a peculiar risk is involved. *Yanez v. U.S.*, 63 F.3d 870 (9th Cir. 1995) (holding that the federal government can be liable under the FTCA for a nondelegable duty to protect against inherently dangerous conditions in an explosives plant when it was aware of such conditions); *Edison*, 822 F.3d at 518 n.4. Federal detention agencies also retain a duty as

landowners and as jailers to warn of hidden dangers, a duty to protect prisoners from a known hazard if knowledge alone is inadequate for prisoners to protect themselves, and a duty to develop an adequate preventative policy. *Id.* at 520–23. “That the United States ha[s] a duty to protect [imprisoned] Plaintiffs is further bolstered by California's recognition of a special relationship between jailers and prisoners.” *Id.* at 521.

208. On information and belief, ICE was the landowner of Mesa Verde at all times relevant to this complaint.

209. By detaining people at Mesa Verde, ICE acts as a jailer and also undertakes an activity that involves a peculiar risk. Detaining people, even at the best of times, is a dangerous activity because it places many people in forced proximity, in a contained environment, where they are not free to provide for their own health and safety. The danger is even more acute during a pandemic, when congregate settings expose more people to infection and place even more strain on the facility's staff, health care, and mental health resources. Mr. Ahn, as a detainee, could not have protected himself from the dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic, even if he had had knowledge of them.

210. ICE thus retained nondelegable duties of care to Mr. Ahn that included the duty to protect him from the known hazard of COVID-19, and the duty to develop an adequate COVID-19 prevention policy.

1044 211. ICE breached that duty in multiple ways, including by conducting
1045 superficial and inconsistent inspections of GEO Group’s operations at Mesa
1046 Verde, by maintaining high numbers of detention that required dense living
1047 conditions, and by failing to put in place adequate COVID-19 prevention
1048 policies and protocols at the facility during the time that Mr. Ahn was
1049 detained.

1050 212. ICE’s failure to meet its duty of reasonable care, given this peculiar
1051 risk, actually and proximately caused Mr. Ahn to suffer extreme mental illness
1052 and distress that led him to commit suicide.

1053 213. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the
1054 FTCA before filing this claim.

1055 214. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

1056
1057 **COUNT THIRTEEN: FALSE IMPRISONMENT – FEDERAL TORTS**
1058 **CLAIMS ACT 28 U.S.C. §1346(b)**
1059 ***Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***
1060

1061 215. To establish false imprisonment under California law, a plaintiff must
1062 show “(1) nonconsensual, intentional confinement of a person, (2) without
1063 lawful privilege, (3) for an appreciable period of time, however brief.” *See*
1064 *Bocanegra v. Jakubowski*, 241 Cal.App.4th 848, 855, 194 Cal.Rptr.3d 327
1065 (2015) (internal quotations omitted). “A false imprisonment action may also
1066 be maintained if ‘the defendant unlawfully detains the [plaintiff] for an

unreasonable period of time’ after an otherwise legal seizure or arrest.”
Rhoden v. U.S., 55 F.3d 428, 430 (9th Cir. 1995) (quoting *Lincoln v. Grazer*,
163 Cal.App.2d 758 (1958)). The government’s lawful privilege to detain
immigrants is circumscribed by the Fifth Amendment, which requires,
among other things, that “the government ... provide conditions of
reasonable health and safety to people in its custody.” *Roman v. Wolf*, 977
F.3d 935, 943 (9th Cir. 2020). The government violates this right, and
therefore acts outside the scope of its lawful privilege, when: “(i) [It] made
an intentional decision with respect to the conditions under which the
plaintiff was confined; (ii) those conditions put the plaintiff at substantial
risk of suffering serious harm; (iii) the [government] did not take reasonable
available measures to abate that risk, even though a reasonable official in the
circumstances would have appreciated the high degree of risk involved ...;
and (iv) by not taking such measures, the [government] caused the plaintiff’s
injuries.” *Gordon v. Cnty. of Orange*, 888 F.3d 1118, 1125 (9th Cir. 2018).

216. ICE falsely imprisoned Mr. Ahn. The agency non-consensually and
intentionally caused Mr. Ahn to be arrested and held at Mesa Verde, and
then detained him for an appreciable period of time: i.e., three months, from
February 2020 until he committed suicide in May 2020.

1086 217. ICE’s imprisonment of Mr. Ahn was without lawful privilege. ICE
1087 made several intentional decisions with respect to the conditions under
1088 which Mr. Ahn was confined—including the decisions to contract GEO
1089 Group to provide medical and mental health care, and the decision to
1090 continue filling the facility with detainees during the COVID-19 pandemic.
1091 Those conditions put Mr. Ahn—who was 74 years old, suffered from
1092 multiple comorbidities and severe mental illness, and had a history of
1093 suicide attempts—at significant and obvious risk of harm. ICE did nothing
1094 to abate that risk. Among other things, ICE failed to release Mr. Ahn during
1095 the pandemic. *See Mendia v. Garcia*, 165 F.Supp.3d 861, 876 (N.D. Cal.
1096 2016) (finding that plaintiff was able to state a claim of false imprisonment
1097 because he “contests the validity of the immigration detainer Defendants
1098 placed on him and argues they compelled him to remain in pretrial detention
1099 when he otherwise would not have had to do so.”). ICE also failed to
1100 implement or enforce adequate COVID-19 safety protocols, including a
1101 protocol for reducing the risk of infection that also did not put mentally ill
1102 detainees in danger; or decrease the density of detainees at Mesa Verde, to
1103 reduce both the risk of the virus spreading and the strain on GEO Group’s
1104 already limited resources.

1105 218. The conditions at Mesa Verde—which ICE either created or
1106 sanctioned—put Mr. Ahn in a situation where he suffered acute mental
1107 distress; was terrified of deportation and serious illness or death because of
1108 deportation; went without adequate mental health resources; and remained
1109 locked in an isolation cell that was not designed for suicide prevention and
1110 was inadequately monitored, making his mental health even worse.
1111 Predictably, those conditions led directly to his extreme emotional distress
1112 and suicide.

1113 219. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the
1114 FTCA before filing this claim.

1115 220. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.
1116

1117 **COUNT FOURTEEN: INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF EMOTIONAL**
1118 **DISTRESS – FEDERAL TORTS CLAIMS ACT 28 U.S.C. §1346(b)**
1119 ***Plaintiff against Defendants United States and ICE***
1120

1121 221. Plaintiff re-alleges and incorporates by reference all allegations in the
1122 foregoing paragraphs.

1123 222. Under California law, intentional infliction of emotional distress
1124 includes the following: “(1) extreme and outrageous conduct by the
1125 defendant with the intention of causing, or reckless disregard of the
1126 probability of causing, emotional distress; (2) the plaintiff’s suffering severe

1127 or extreme emotional distress; (3) and actual and proximate causation of the
1128 emotional distress by the defendant’s outrageous conduct.” *Pardi*, 389 F.3d
1129 at 852 (quoting *Cervantez*, 24 Cal.3d at 593) (internal quotations omitted).

1130 223. Here, ICE’s conduct was extreme and outrageous. Mr. Ahn had
1131 multiple comorbidities that put him at risk of serious illness or death if he
1132 contracted COVID-19. He also had severe mental health issues that made
1133 him particularly susceptible to emotional distress—a fact about which ICE,
1134 which had access to all his records, was well-aware. Nonetheless, ICE
1135 continued to lock up Mr. Ahn in an unsafe facility with a high risk of
1136 contagion, under a constant threat of deadly infection or deportation. This
1137 conduct was extreme and outrageous, and, given Mr. Ahn’s conditions,
1138 recklessly disregarded the risk that it would subject him to extreme
1139 emotional distress. *See, e.g., Mendia v. Garcia*, 165 F.Supp.3d 861, 879
1140 (N.D. Cal. 2016) (Immigrant detainee who alleges that ICE “agents’ threat
1141 of deportation combined with [his] imprisonment under the detainer state
1142 plausible facts to support an intentional infliction of emotional distress
1143 claim.”); *Plascencia v. United States*, No. EDCV 17-02515 JGB (SPx), 2018
1144 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 229246, at *27-32 (C.D. Cal. May 25, 2018) (finding a
1145 plausible IIED claim at the motion to dismiss stage when ICE agents

threatened to deport her, finding that these statements were extreme as a matter of law).

224. ICE's conduct was the actual and proximate cause of Mr. Ahn's emotional distress—which was so severe that no reasonable person could be expected to endure it. Indeed, Mr. Ahn could not endure his distress, and ultimately committed suicide.

225. Plaintiff has exhausted the administrative process required by the FTCA before filing this claim.

226. Plaintiff brings this claim Individually and as Successor-in-Interest.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

227. Enter judgment in favor of Plaintiff and against Defendants.

228. Enter an order declaring Defendants actions to be unlawful.

229. Award Plaintiff compensatory and punitive damages in an amount to be determined at trial.

230. Award Plaintiff reasonable attorney's fees and costs.

231. Award any other relief this Court deems just, equitable, and proper.

Date: April 19, 2023

Submitted by Sylvia Ahn
on behalf of the Estate of Choung Woong Ahn
By her Counsel,

/s/ Oren Nimni

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